

## A song to sing or to read: Sent Forth by God's Blessing

Sent forth by God's blessing, our true faith confessing  
the people of God from his table take leave.

The supper is ended: may now be extended  
the fruits of his service in all who believe.

The seed of his teaching, our hungry souls reaching  
the blossom in action for all humankind.

His grace shall incite us, his love shall unite us  
to work for his kingdom, his purpose to find.



With praise and thanksgiving to God ever living  
the tasks of our everyday life we will face.

Our faith ever sharing, in love ever caring  
embracing as neighbours all those of each race.

One feast that has fed us, one light that has led us  
unite us as one in his life that we share.

Then may all the living, with praise and thanksgiving  
give honour to Christ and his name that we bear.

*Lyrics and music in the public domain*

## Closing Prayer

Father God, as we prepare to travel the week ahead we pray that, rather than be distracted and overwhelmed by 'the big picture', we remember that it is the change that comes in the smallest of ways in our hearts and in our spirits which translates into our actions. We pray that despite our feelings of inadequacy and insignificance, we may remind ourselves that you have poured your love upon us. We will remember that we have been gifted seeds of hope and compassion; that we can be the treasure that is meant to enrich our world. We ask for your help to have the confidence in your presence to step out in faith to witness to your love in all that we do. In doing so we ask for your guidance, your forgiveness, and courage to be at work in your kingdom. Amen

*(Adapted from a prayer by Nancy C Townley)*

**With thanks to Janice Monk for preparing today's reflection**



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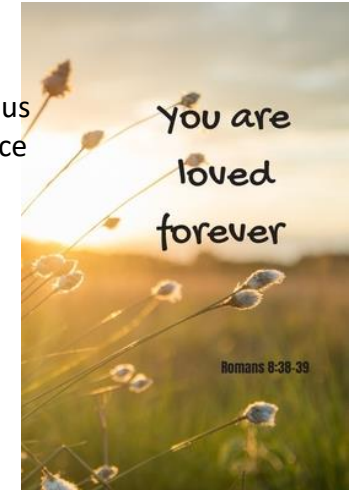
Church in a Bag  
26 July 2020  
Dubbo Uniting Church



## A Gathering

Lord, as we gather today joined in fellowship  
seeking answers in a world that often troubles us  
we pray that we may sense your gentle presence  
nudging us, subtly guiding us, reassuring us.

May your unconditional love  
keeping us rooted in faith  
allow us to grow to know you more  
and give us the grace to embrace a  
love for others  
as we seek to serve you.



## Preparation

As always, life can be difficult when the world we live in is far from perfect. Sometimes it seems as if the pain and suffering outweigh the joy to be found when humanity is at its best. Despite our best efforts, it is sometimes our own actions which impact badly on others.

*"Everyday life is ruled by custom, habit, and routine, and these can all too readily cultivate a God obscuring stasis. Unless one realises that things are not what they seem to be and that they will not be as they are forever (as the leaven and the mustard seed reveal) one will miss what matters most – the pearl, the treasure – and substitute a god of lesser value and meaning. People can gain the whole superficial world and yet lose their own souls." (Professor Dale Allison)*

When we as Christians understand and accept, none of this can keep us away from God's love (Romans 8:38-39). The peace, strength and comfort that His love brings helps to negate feelings that may stop us from approaching God to find the comfort we need.

## Reading: Matthew 13:13–31, 44–52

Obediently, albeit reluctantly, complying with the severe water restrictions imposed by Council, I found it really challenging to observe the devastating impact on our garden. We rejoiced when encouraging rains began to fall and marvelled at the astonishing response, not only on the land but in urban areas as well. While our hearts were gladdened by the survival and even renewed growth in established plants, we were also dismayed by the proliferation of vigorous and lush weeds, thought to be 'dealt with' long ago. Those 'weeds', literally 'a plant growing in the wrong place', have taught me many lessons. They can lay dormant for years, waiting for more favourable conditions, before bursting into life. They are strong, they can rapidly proliferate, some are labelled as noxious, some are edible and nutritious, others have medicinal properties. Weeds, pulled up, and kept underwater in a container for a few weeks make a highly nutritious liquid fertiliser.

Maybe the parable of the mustard seed isn't necessarily telling us not to weed our garden, because all weeds are good now and all weeds should be welcomed, but it can challenge our assumptions. Society, in the time of Jesus, was beginning to view his teachings – non-violent resistance, wealth redistribution, loving our neighbours as we do ourselves - as weeds to be removed. There was a failure to understand that what the people of his time viewed as a weed to be destroyed, was in fact a tree of life.

There is always value, inspiration and excitement in looking at our world afresh! In the vision that Jesus advances, the love and mercy of God is for all. So many groups in our present-day society are marginalised and when they hear Jesus's radical good news, it must be just as confronting and amazing for them as it has been for those who consider themselves *agents of God's judgement*.

<sup>51</sup> "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. <sup>52</sup> He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."



May we learn to value *everything* that God, the creator, has provided. May we embrace all that Jesus, the sower, has planted and so better understand what surprising insights the Holy Spirit continues to reveal to us.

## Reading: Romans 8:26–39

So often as we sit in communal silence during a funeral service, we respond to those often-read words to be found in the last letter written by a missionary 30 years after his conversion experience. "*I am convinced,*" Paul writes, "*that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*".

While those words usually bring great comfort, they also jolt us into our present-day reality. In our weekly prayers of intercession, the list of concerns is long. Drought, fire, famine, poverty, repressive regimes, child abuse, family violence, discrimination, concerns about mental health. When we are alone and finding it hard to articulate those matters which concern us most deeply, we despair. When we struggle to form our words into prayers because we are overcome by doubts, we question. When we feel most alone and most vulnerable, we sometimes feel unworthy.

How wonderful then, that we can return again and again to those magnificent words which proclaim the sovereignty of God with the assurance that salvation in Jesus Christ is for all. When we are lost for words, the Holy Spirit will always speak for us; when our words and thoughts seem to make little sense or our thoughts swirl around in chaos, the Holy Spirit will make sure that we are heard. Remember "*We are more than conquerors through him who loved us*" (8:37).

In humility and wonder we can rejoice that God's unconditional love is available to all. Individually we need to be willing to accept His love and be brave in our proclamation. With a passion for love, justice, compassion and honesty, to challenge ourselves constantly as to how we can be as inclusive.